

Aesthetics of Mundane Interactions

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Abstract. John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics is used as a conceptual basis for designing new technologies that support staff-members' mundane social interactions in an academic department. From this perspective, aesthetics is seen as a broader phenomenon that encompasses experiential aspects of staff-members' everyday lives and not only a look-&-feel aspect.

1. Aesthetics of Mundane Interactions

Our everyday activities and interactions in public and private settings often involve use of several heterogeneous media (physical and digital). We adapt, appropriate and even combine these different media to support our activities. The personal and ubiquitous technology push has made interactive products so 'unremarkable' that these products are gradually becoming a part of our everyday mundane lives. In other words, it would not be an exaggeration to say that ubiquitous technology push intentionally makes interactive technology a part of our mundane lives. Technologies that are used in domestic and office environments are the prime examples of this trend.

However, there is a growing criticism about the notions such as *seamlessness* and *disappearance* within the ubiquitous computing applications for its narrow and deterministic focus [1]. When computers had recognized and pre-specified tasks to follow, artificial intelligence techniques such as machine learning, computer vision or other pattern recognition techniques were a useful option. But when technology is becoming a part of people's everyday life, technologists need to understand the subtlety, fluidity and idiosyncratic nature of technology use. We believe that a thoughtful understanding of people's mundane life can provide several interesting implications about designing new ubiquitous technologies. Put simply, by understanding people's mundane interactions as a first step could provide socio-cultural and context-sensitive information for designing ubiquitous technology.

To be able to explore and understand people's everyday mundane interactions we applied John Dewey's [2] insights of pragmatist aesthetics in practice. Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics suggests that aesthetics of an experience cannot be seen as a collection of isolated and separate entities. It is a 'lived' reality and a coherent whole that is continuous and irreducible. Contradicting with the analytical approaches,

pragmatist aesthetics suggests that by separating an aesthetic experience, our understanding of an 'experience as a whole' is distorted and impoverished.

We used a conceptual framework [3] to explore aesthetics of mundane social interactions of staff-members in an academic work environment. The main purpose to do this was to explore and design possible technological solutions that can be sensitive to the social environment and everyday practices of staff-members. We used observations, contextual interviews and cultural probe methods to elicit staff-members experiences in their everyday lives. We explored the intersections between the physical spaces in the department and the actual practices that enable and circulate through them. The qualitative data from the study indicate that aesthetics played an important role in interpersonal and instrumental aspects of staff-members' everyday life. Aesthetics was also prevalent in both physical and social spaces of the academic environment. We draw out several important implications to design new technologies that can support social interactions taking pragmatist aesthetics into account.

References

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